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ABSTRACT

Prepared for a White House Conference on Children (December 1970), this report describes a Newark, New Jersey program which began with day care for young children and grew into an educational continuum beginning in some cases at the age of 18 months and running through the fourth grade. The program is considered remarkable for the amount of parent support it has gained, for the degree of parent direction under which it operates, and for the methods of operation within the framework of the black urban life style. Innovative instructional practices include parent shaping of the curriculum, parent involvement in diagnosis on the basis of tests, and parent administrative activities, including a strong say in the hiring and firing of teachers. A distinctive feature is the emphasis on education within the black life style. The first communication with the child is in his own dialect; the transition to standard English is made later, with "speaking to be understood" as a goal. In the early years, much attention is given to the development of physical skills to counteract crib infancies. Objectives, as such, are not used; instead an action framework is implicit. There is one teacher and one teacher's aide for every 20 pupils. For other booklets in the series, see UD 011 120-123, and 011 125. (Author/JM)

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EDU 45784

Model Programs

Childhood Education

Springfield Avenue Community School

Newark, New Jersey

A school whose curricular emphasis is on the black "life-style"

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

A program which began with day care for young children has grown into an educational continuum beginning, in some cases, at age 18 months and running through the fourth grade. The program is remarkable for the amount of parent support it has gained, for the degree of parent direction under which it operates, and for its methods of operation within the framework of the black urban life-style.

Innovative instructional practices include parent shaping of the curriculum, parent involvement in diagnosis on the basis of tests, and parent administrative activities, including a strong say in the hiring and firing of teachers.

THE COMMUNITY

Newark was described in 1968 as having "the highest percentage of substandard housing, the most crime per 100,000 of population, the heaviest per capita tax burden, and the sharpest shifts in population of any major American city." Only 16 percent of the population was born there, and the pupil turnover rate was 44 percent. Average family size was over six persons. Among major American cities it ranked second in population density, infant mortality, and birth rate. Unemployment was very high, as was the

percentage of the population on welfare. School buildings were old and crowded, and there were few outdoor play facilities.

School population was rapidly increasing as young migrant families moved into the city, and three out of four school children were either black or Puerto Rican. The high school dropout rate was about one-third, and half of the sixth-graders were 18 months or more below the national average in reading ability. Racial tensions ran high and serious riots had occurred.

To meet this situation Dr. Franklyn Titus, superintendent of schools, requested Federal aid for innovative programs. One of these evolved into the Springfield Avenue Community School. The education director of the program is Mr. James Baten; Hortense P. Jones of New York City has served as design team coordinator; and Mrs. Mary Willis of the Newark Day Care Council has been instrumental in creating the program and in its continued evolution.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The Newark Day Care Council, formed in 1967, established centers for day care and supervised a network of approved day care homes in which children were cared for by the housewife. The need for more extensive day care facilities, the fact that the city was

short of space for school-age children, and the availability of a large warehouse made possible the integration of preschool and school education in a single institution, which opened in January 1969. Preschool children use the first floor; kindergarten through fourth-grade children, the second.

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The physical plant has been remodeled according to the program's specifications. Although it is run down outside, the inside has been transformed into a cheerful world for children. Rugs cover the floors, bright pictures are everywhere, and partial partitioning sets off working areas.

PARENT POWER

From the very beginning parents have been involved in the program. Community workshops on "boardsmanship" were held to teach the parents to become politically effective in educational matters. The organizational structure of the Newark Day Care Center was explained to the parents as analogous to that of the Negro churches already familiar to them. Parents were taught how to work their way up the chain of command to get a problem solved, how to bring about change by serving on committees, and how to get

projects funded. Role-playing and practical problems solidified the instruction.

This indoctrination program was completely successful, and the parents are now politically sophisticated. The school's guiding committee is the Parents' Action Council, made up of all the parents. Supervision in this school is not from the top downward. The board of education permits teachers to use their own discretion in handling classroom problems, but they are held accountable by the parents. A teacher whom the parents regard as unsuitable is asked to leave. The faculty now numbers 30 and includes two white teachers and one Puerto Rican teacher; the remainder are black. The teachers are deeply committed to the project.

The parents, who initially had only an average interest in education, are now enthusiastic. They have the spirit and sense of involvement of a tightly knit family group. The school is a place that must be protected; during serious riots the parents themselves stood guard around it to make sure that it was not burned.

Many parents are on the payroll--not only in the capacity of workers and aides; the test administrator, the social worker, and the photographer are all drawn from the community.

The school and the parents maintain close relationships. Children are brought in by bus from all over the city because the parents have decided that, once a child is a student at the school, he should not be forced to go to any other school, even when he moves to another part of the city. The possibility that a child might graduate from third grade, thus terminating both his and his parents' connection with the school, led to a successful movement to add a fourth grade. Parents feel strongly that they have exercised and will continue to exercise a measure of control over the destiny of the school and their children's education.

The philosophy underlying parental control and construction of the curriculum is summed up in the *Community Journal*, published by the school: "Home, family, and cultural traditions are the master teachers; the school listens, learns, and then becomes capable of teaching."

THE LIFE-STYLE

A distinctive feature of this program is the emphasis on education within the black life-style. The first communication with the child is in his own dialect; the transition to standard English is made later, with "speaking to be understood" as a goal. The aim is not to replace the life-style dialect, but to enable

the child to use whichever one is suitable in a given situation. For example, the learning design for 5- to 6-year-olds includes: "Uses complex sentences rich in 'life-style' modifiers." Even the 7- to 8-year-olds are encouraged to use life-style language, since through it they can express their feelings more succinctly. However, by this age the child is expected to be sensitive to the speech preferences of other groups and to routinely use "school language." The aim is to provide a system of learning that will "not only value the child for what he is, but help him use his strengths to become a positive functioning member of the larger society."

Teaching materials are often life-style: picture books portray life-style situations, and life-style pictures are cut up to make puzzles. Textbooks prepared by the parents in the life-style language are bound by the city library. The textbooks also include family anecdotes, stories of the past of the black people, and stories from the ghetto as well as the rural environment in which many of the parents grew up. Voodoo tales are also included.

In the early years much attention is given to the development of physical skills. For example, 2-year-olds are taught to climb on a climbing board locally designed and built. This is necessary

because many of the children have been "crib children," confined to a crib to facilitate caring for them. In some homes the largest open space available for play has been the double bed. For the crib child the order of perception is likely to be reversed from the usual kinesthetic-visual sequence: he perceives first visually and then kinesthetically--he can see but he cannot touch.

Objectives, as such, are not used; instead an action framework is implicit. Shifts in action are in response to a child's needs and, equally important, the parent's perception of a child's needs. However, a "learning design" is provided, which serves the general purpose of objectives. In this the research findings concerning children of various ages are tabulated, along with modifications for applying these research findings to ghetto children.

The learning design calls for a 5-year-old to be able to read 25-35 words by the end of the school year; a 6-year-old to read 100-150; a 7-year-old, 150-300; and an 8-year-old, 300-400.

The major goals are stated as being:

- To provide continuity of learning from 18 months through the fourth grade
- To provide a school curriculum that is "life-style"
- To develop the child's skills so that he will be able to compete outside his present environment

An informal goal is stated more vividly--"give the young child identity while he's young."

COSTS

The program is sponsored by the Newark Day Care Council, the Newark Board of Education, and the New Jersey State Department of Education. It also receives Federal funds. Following the original capital expenditures for equipment and materials, the ongoing supply of texts and other resources has been at the same level as for other schools in the district.

The ratio of adult personnel to students is one usually found only in remedial work: one teacher and one teacher's aide to

every 20 pupils. This contrasts with the teacher-pupil ratio for the district as a whole, which is considerably higher.

The education of children aged 5 to 10 is funded by the school board, as are the education director, the physical plant, one school bus, medical service, the audiovisual specialist, teachers' aides, and one extra teacher. Funding for the preschool children comes from the Day Care Council, which receives funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and other agencies.

Numerous additional services are provided for the children, such as meals "whenever required," medical and psychiatric services, and after-school care.

Costs associated with the learning design team and aide training are borne by the State Department of Education.

RESULTS

An initial period of doubt and skepticism was overcome when the parents learned that they could fulfill a meaningful role in developing a school to their liking. They have adopted a problem-solving approach and show a willingness to work together with

white teachers and educators for the achievement of common goals. One of the parents' publications even expresses concern over the fact that Newark also has poor white migrants who do not know how to get a job or help. Racial problems are almost nonexistent, probably because the school is so largely black and there is no question as to whose "life-style" used in the teaching approach is to be regarded as basic. The few white students also are being educated in the life-style without apparent friction. The family-like cohesiveness of the school appears to include both black and white.

The experiment seems to have been highly successful in involving the parents and developing in them a sense of dedication. The aspirations and hopes of the parents appear to center around the education of their children.

The testing program uses various forms of nationally standardized achievement tests and all citywide tests. These are administered to all students, kindergarten through fourth grade. IQ tests are administered beginning at the third grade. According to the school's education director the results of these tests indicate that the students, on the whole, are achieving "at least at national norms." Before test results on individual children

are sent to the school district, the parent has an opportunity to study his child's performance on the test and participate in planning how his performance can be improved.

Tests have been developed locally to measure the readiness and communication skills of students at the second-, third-, and fourth-grade levels.

A diagnostic test is being developed locally and should be available during the 1970-71 school year.

FUTURE PLANS

Although the Springfield Avenue Community School is basically experimental in nature, parents regard it as permanent. They feel that positive educational action can be undertaken by other similarly committed parent groups and that shifts in priorities at various governmental levels are essential to widespread adoption of their approach. The State Department of Education for New Jersey, through its research and development units, is disseminating information about successful practices developed at the school.

The school itself plans to develop its testing program further, particularly the diagnostic tests.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the program may be obtained from Mrs. Mary Willis of the Newark Day Care Council or Mr. James Baten, the educational director, at the following address:

Springfield Avenue Community School
447 18th Avenue
Newark, New Jersey 07111
(201) 242-4790

Prior appointment is required for all visitors, who must be escorted at all times by parents.

The following 12-page booklets are published by the school:

Multi-Media in Education

Growing--Home to School

The Young Years

Boardsmanship

A photographic leaflet entitled "Springfield Avenue Community School, A Summer Program" provides graphic presentation of the school and the children. The design team has produced a book on learning design entitled "Continuing Learning Design, Language Arts" (copyright 1969 by the Newark Day Care Council, 517 Springfield Avenue, Newark, New Jersey), which would be of great value to any group seeking to replicate the Newark Experiment in another location.

The Springfield Avenue Community School Experiment is the subject of 6 or 7 minutes of a film produced by NBC as a TV documentary entitled *Newark--A City Too Strong To Die*. This film can be borrowed from Jerry Bentley, NBC News, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020.

A magazine, *Community Journal*, published by the Springfield Avenue Community School, tells something of life within the school and of the philosophy on which it is based.

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.